

MERIDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Pride In All We Do



3/11/14

Dear Representatives of the General Assembly,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill No. 5331 and Bill No. 5078. Allowing for public participation and input in matters as important as these are symbolic of the foundation upon which this country was built. By looking at the number in attendance, it is clear that many want to share their thoughts. Thank you for this opportunity.

I come to you today as an educator in my 16th year in Meriden Public Schools; an advocate for schools, I serve as Co-Chair of the Legislative Achievement Gap Task Force; and a school leader. After having served as a school principal for ten years, I have the pleasure of supporting Meriden teachers as we move forward with a new evaluation and development plan. Most importantly, however, I sit here today speaking to you as a father of two elementary-aged children. I know I speak for Meriden's Superintendent Dr. Mark Benigni, and his wife Amy, who also have two children in the same school as my children.

I went into education because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of children. I am here today because that passion has only gotten stronger over the years. For me, today there is more at stake—my children. Yet, in CT, your zip code and color of skin still factor as better determinants of your success than many other factors. National Assessment of Educational Progress data, commonly referred to as the Nation's Report Card, shows that as far as 25 years back, there have been gaps in achievement between Black/Latino/and poor children and their majority counterparts that have gone relatively unchanged. As co-chair of the Achievement Gap Task Force, with your support, we will submit a Master Plan that will aim to address this. These data should create urgency in all of us. For me, I do not want my two Puerto Rican American children who live in Meriden and attend Meriden Public Schools to have any less opportunity to achieve than their peers in neighboring communities. They should be able to attend MPS and succeed. Thanks to their wonderful mother, teachers, and school, they will.

Over the last ten years, under the No Child Left Behind era in education, we saw a tremendous narrowing of curriculum to those things that were assessed. Worse, we saw too many teaching and classroom activities mirror the format of the tests. Unfortunately, teachers in high need districts had to prepare the students for the test in ways that limited their ability to shape instruction based on student need. This shift to the common core gives us an opportunity to hit the reset button on ten years of practices that were partly ineffective. It allows us to rethink the skill and drill practice and over emphasis on test-prep that have stunted the growth of our students and narrowed the creativity and autonomy our teachers need to meet their needs of their learners. Adopting a curriculum

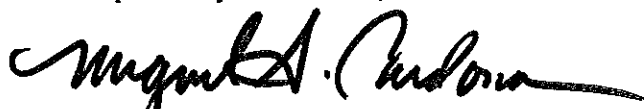
that is based on thinking and problem solving, one that prepares my children for a world that looks different than the one we live in today, and one that helps reverse the achievement disparities in this State is what we need. It makes sense for our kids, it makes sense for our economy. Given the NAEP data, what we are doing is clearly not working. Doing the same of something that is not working makes no sense. I am not talking about educational reform. We need to constantly evolve in education and we need to evolve faster!

Teachers and leaders need more support. Research shows that in the school house, no other factors matter more relative to school achievement than the teacher and the leader. We need a support and evaluation system that is grounded in support. Thank you to the shifts in teacher evaluation in the State, we have that in Meriden. Far from perfect, however, we are serious about creating a model that works for children. For the first time in my eleven years as a school or district leader, we are re-prioritizing teacher support and development. We are building systems that allow teachers to learn from one another. We are not allowing excuses or distractions that prevent us from getting into classrooms and supporting our teachers. I am encouraged to say that we are focusing in the right things, teacher support and a curriculum that requires thinking.

There is only one thing I can guarantee. We will not get it right the first time. Success is not linear. The path from where we are to where we need to be will not be perfect. Change, uncertainty, and adjustments along the way are prerequisites for progress. Our path to success will have bumps in the road, detours, compromises, negotiations, and mistakes that will foster authentic collaboration. Instead of halting progress, I ask that we come together in support of a plan that is not Democrat or Republican, traditional or reform, urban or suburban. I have confidence that the leaders in this room can help shape the CCSS and Teacher Evaluation plan in a way that takes into account the needs of the various constituents they represent. As our achievement data in the State over the last 25 years suggest, our kids cannot wait. My kids can't wait. Please consider my testimony and my commitment to support you as you move forward supporting the plan in a way that makes sense for the students in the State of Connecticut.

Thank you for your time, and more importantly, for your work on behalf of our children.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Miguel A. Cardona". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Miguel A. Cardona
Meriden Public Schools
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